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*The Glory of the Second Temple superior to that
of the First: or, The Edification of Chris-
tian Societies promoted.*

T W O

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S E R M O N S

Delivered to a CONGREGATION of
PROTESTANT DISSENTERS,
At the first Opening of
A NEW MEETING-HOUSE,
In MARE-STREET, HACKNEY,
OCTOBER 13, 1771.

By SAMUEL PALMER.

L O N D O N :

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S E R M O N S

PROTESTANT DISSENT



IN A SERMON

L O N D O N

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DISCOURSE I.

HAGGAI ii. 9.

The glory of this latter house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts, and in this place will I give peace.

THOUGH, as Protestant Dissenters, we disavow the ceremony of consecrating churches, not finding any traces of it in the New Testament, nor being able to conceive that any such rite can make one place more holy than another; we think it no way inconsistent with ourselves to erect houses for divine worship, to appropriate them to that use alone, or, when we first assemble in them, to take some special notice of such an occasion. Many thoughts will naturally occur, both in prayer and preaching, which may contribute towards answering those important ends which we should always propose in attending divine institutions, the glory of God, and our own religious improvement. — To such thoughts we shall easily be led in attending to the words now read as the subject of this discourse: in which is contained a comparative view of the

two temples erected under the Jewish dispensation, and a superior glory is promised to the latter. Not, indeed, in its external appearance, the magnificence of its size or form, or its costly and beautiful ornaments; in this respect the first temple, which king Solomon built, is allowed to have had greatly the preeminence. The Jews themselves, who had seen both, were so apprehensive of this, that amidst all the joy which was discovered when the foundation of the second house was laid, those who remembered the first, could not refrain from weeping to think how much this was inferior. See *Ezra* iii. 12. *But many of the priests and Levites, and chief of the fathers who were ancient men, that had seen the first house, when the foundation of this was laid before their eyes, wept with a loud voice.* To the same purpose are the words addressed to Zerubbabel in our context (ver. 3.) *Who is left among you that saw this house in her first glory? and how do you see it now? Is it not in your eyes in comparison of it as nothing?* That superior glory, therefore, which is here promised to the second temple, you will naturally suppose consisted of some *internal* ornament, some *spiritual* beauty, of which the former was destitute. What that was, is plain from the verses connected with the text; viz. the presence of the Messiah, God's incarnate Son; here called *the desire of all nations*. From the mention of this circumstance, you may readily imagine my design, on the present occasion, is not to mispend your sacred time by comparing this house in which we are now met with that which our fathers built, and pointing out its superior beauty and convenience; I rather intend what will be more profitable to you, as well as more pleasant to myself, to treat of that internal glory to which the text refers, which is the noblest ornament

ornament to any worshipping assembly, and with respect to which it is above all things desirable that the words may be applicable to this.

I hope, however, I may be allowed to congratulate you that, in a *literal* sense, they may be applied here; and that it will not be an abuse of the text, or of this place, if I,

FIRST, take occasion to remark the propriety and importance of erecting decent and commodious places for God's worship.

It is readily allowed that the Almighty *dwelleth not in temples made with hands*, and that the most splendid edifice which mortal hands can raise, would not in *itself* be more pleasing to him than the meanest: That he principally regards the characters of his worshippers, and the manner in which their services are performed. But it would be unjust to infer from hence, that it is of no consequence in what places we meet to worship God. There are other considerations to be attended to, besides what is acceptable to the Most High, relating to the external parts of religion, which many pious persons amongst us, in their honest zeal against popish superstitions, seem to have overlooked. Surely there can be no just reason assigned why people in general (and the rich among others) should not be as agreeably accommodated in God's house as they are in their own. The *pleasure*, and therefore in some degree, the *benefit* of divine ordinances requires that they should. And so, I will add, does the *reputation* of religion in the world, which is too prone to judge of things according to their outward appearance, and to fix the idea of meanness or dignity to any particular mode of worship, according as the place in which it is performed is mean or otherwise. — Let it be further observed, that the internal respect which

the great God himself requires from his creatures, may as properly be expressed by the *places* we erect for his worship, as by other external signs. We are required to *glorify God with our bodies* as well as *with our spirits*, and to *honour him with our substance* too. But can we properly be said to do either, when we are negligent with respect to the externals of his worship? It can hardly be supposed that those persons have much zeal for the reputation of his ordinances, or the honour of his name, who dwell in sumptuous houses of their own, but suffer *his house to lie waste*, or to *become a by-word and a reproach*. David was of another mind, who expressed great concern that while he himself *dwelt in an house of cedar*, the ark of God *should dwell only in curtains*; who declared, that *the zeal of God's house had eaten him up*; and refused to *serve God with that which cost him nothing*.

Tho' the Lord of heaven and earth condescends to honour with his presence the meanest places of his humble poor, and kindly to accept their smallest offerings; tho' he always prefers the spiritual sacrifices of the humble and contrite heart, to the most costly presents, or the richest decorations of an edifice, he cannot excuse the rich who think any thing good enough for what concerns religion, and must be highly offended when the want of a respectable place for his worship proceeds from covetousness or neglect, or an undue solicitude to aggrandize themselves. Tho' he attended to the prayers of Jeremy in the mire, Daniel in the lion's den, Jonah in the whale's belly; and accepted the service of the Israelites when the ark was kept only in a tent; he was not averse to having places appropriated to his service, when there was opportunity for it, in which he might be worshipped *in the beauty of holiness*; and ever shewed

shewed himself pleased or displeased, according as the Israelites were zealous or negligent about what concerned the honour of his name and the credit of religion. (See Hag. i. 4—10.)

He has also promised to those in general who *honour him with their substance*, that *he will honour, bless, and prosper them.* Prov. iii. 9, 10.

To build and support commodious houses for the public worship of the Almighty is indeed one branch of *natural religion*, to which *Christianity* is far from lessening the obligation. It is mentioned to the honor of the Roman Centurion, and as an high recommendation of him to the notice of our Saviour, that, tho' an heathen, out of the love he had to the Jewish nation, at his own expence he had *built them a synagogue.* (Luke vii. 5.) Our Lord was so far from denying this to be a commendable instance of his generosity and zeal, that he immediately went to his house, and not only healed his servant, but commended his faith.

It must be acknowledged, that neither our Saviour, nor any of his Apostles, have given any directions concerning the building of places for Christian assemblies, much less required that they should be very costly and magnificent; on the contrary, it was designed that under the gospel dispensation, the shew and pomp of the temple worship should cease; and that a simplicity, suited to the humble character of the man Christ Jesus, should take place in all divine institutions. Moreover, it is well known, that the first Christians met to worship in private houses, or wherever they could. But it does not thence follow, either that there should be no places appropriated to social worship under the gospel, when opportunity should permit, or that they should not be neat and convenient. Our Saviour himself often worshipped and

taught in the synagogues of Judea, and in the temple too. Nay, he discovered remarkable resentment against what looked like a contempt of God's house, when he drove the buyers and sellers out of the temple; and strongly encouraged liberality for supporting the service of it, when he so highly commended the poor widow for casting her two mites into the treasury. It is also worthy of notice here, that though he never sought great things for himself, but always preferred good dispositions in the hearts of his hearers to any personal honours paid to him, he was not utterly averse to outward marks of respect; but vindicated and extolled that pious female friend of his, who, out of her ardent zeal to do him honour, poured a quantity of liquid perfume upon him which *might have been sold for above five hundred pence*, or (in our money) upwards of ten pounds. Instead of hinting that she was to be blamed for *making this waste*, as one of his disciples did, and saying *it might have been sold and given to the poor*, he replies to this officious deceitful friend, *Let her alone, she hath wrought a good work on me. Wherever this gospel shall be preached throughout the world, this that she hath done shall be spoken of for a memorial of her.* (Mark xiv. 19.) I will only add, that with regard to the externals of divine worship, the apostle Paul gives this general exhortation to Christians, *Let all things be done decently and in order.* (1 Cor. xiv. 40.)

Should it be asked, "By what rule we are to judge of decency and order? and where is the just medium between extravagance and penury, pomp and meanness, in erecting houses for public worship?" I answer, the following seems to me a just and obvious one: That they should bear a proportion to the circumstances of the worshippers,

and the houses in which the generality of them dwell; so as not to equal the splendor of the most splendid, nor yet the meanness of the meanest. But, (in regard to this matter,) I apprehend, true generosity, accompanied with christian prudence, will not easily or greatly err. Permit me to speak it to the honour of this congregation, that you have observed this happy medium in erecting this building. While in consequence of your liberality, this house exceeds the former in beauty and convenience, prudence has been suffered to form the plan, so that it cannot be reflected upon as in any view unsuitable to the solemn use to which it is appropriated, or the circumstances of the people who attend in it. It is hoped that what has been said, may serve to vindicate and recommend your conduct who have been the warmest in this undertaking, and satisfy such, if such there should be, who think the whole expence unnecessary. For these reasons I have said thus much, (which some may possibly think too much) on this least interesting, but I hope not wholly useless, part of the subject. Let us now proceed to what is of far greater moment, viz.

SECONDLY, to treat of that internal, spiritual glory, which rendered the second temple so much superior to the first. That the prophet in the text could not refer to any thing external is plain from what hath been already observed. It is true, a little before our Saviour's time, Herod, (in order to ingratiate himself with the Jews) was at great expence in * beautifying this latter house; but

* It is supposed by some eminent Christian writers, that *Herod* entirely pulled down the old temple, and built a new one of much greater magnificence. If this were fact, it would be difficult to reconcile it with the common application of this

but still, it was far from exceeding the first; and there is one very material circumstance which rendered it vastly inferior; namely, the want of that visible glory, the *Shechinah*, which adorned the temple of Solomon, but never appeared in this.—But a brief attention to our context will render it abundantly evident, that the superior glory promised to the second temple was, what we have already mentioned, *The bodily presence of the Messiah, our incarnate Saviour.*

The evident design of the chapter, is to encourage the people in the work they had under-

this prophecy to the Messiah, which goes on the supposition that he came while the second temple stood. But the whole evidence of it rests upon the testimony of *Josephus*, whose report the Jews would naturally wish to propagate; who is not always quite consistent with himself, and ever seems disposed to magnify what related to the honour of his own nation. His account of this matter indeed has greatly the appearance of fiction. Not to say how improbable it is that so inconsiderable a prince as Herod should be able to erect so magnificent and expensive a structure as this is said to be, (employing 10,000 skilful artificers, and 1000 priests to superintend the work, as well as 1000 waggons to bring materials;) and that each stone in the building should be marble, 25 cubits long, 8 deep and 12 broad; it is to the last degree incredible, if not impossible, “that, (as he asserts) the whole building, which was raised 20 feet higher than the temple of *Zerubabel*, should (though founded upon a rock) in a few years sink 20 feet into the earth, by reason of the foundation giving way,” and yet remain entire; especially when the holy of holies was but 20 feet in height at first. These circumstances confirm me in the belief that Herod did not rebuild, but only repair, enlarge, and beautify the second temple. *Poole* (Syn. crit. in loc.) mentions an ancient writer, *Egesippus*, who lived not much later than *Josephus*, as establishing this account. “*Templum, inquit, Herodes ornavit, omnem illum circa templum loci ambitum circumvallavit muro, &c. Ex eo igitur Josephus est corrigendus.*” *Dr. Lowth* affirms, that the ancient Jews speak of the temple from the time of *Zerubbabel* to its destruction under *Vespasian* as one and the same. He particularly quotes *Josephus* himself, as speaking in the same manner.

taken,

taken, of rebuilding the temple. The prophet, with this view, is ordered to speak to Zerubbabel, who was at the head of this grand affair, and acquaint him with what an honour the Lord intended to crown their labours; telling him in general, that tho' the building which they had begun should be inferior to the former in one view, it should be superior in another and more important one. After which, he describes the circumstances that should precede the Messiah's appearance, and then his character, and the blessings of his kingdom. With respect to the former he thus speaks, (ver. 6.) *For thus saith the Lord of hosts, yet once it is a little while, (or rather according to the LXX. once more; signifying a final alteration) I will shake the heavens and the earth, and the sea and the dry land; or, (as this Hebrew form of expression is explained in the next words) I will shake all nations; referring to the extraordinary commotions and grand revolutions which should take place in the empires of this world, before that of the Redeemer should be established. It deserves notice here, that the apostle to the Hebrews (Ch. xii. 37.) argues the perpetuity of the Christian dispensation which was taking place of the Mosaic, from this very passage, which (according to the Septuagint version) he expounds thus: And this word, "yet once more," signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.—The prophet then goes on plainly to speak of the Messiah himself, whom he characterizes as The desire (or expectation) of all nations. A character which can be applied to no other than to our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom indeed, it is well known the ancient Jews always used to apply it, and to whom it most justly belongs. Him had all the nations*

nations of the earth the highest reason to desire, he being in every view qualified to deliver them from that moral darkness, slavery and guilt, in which they were involved, and to restore them to the original dignity and true felicity of their natures. Such a person as this, the wisest men among the heathen wished to appear in the world, and indeed had some general notion would appear. Two celebrated historians, *Suetonius* and *Tacitus*, have said very strong and remarkable things on this head.* And we have the fullest evidence, that to the Jewish nation, he was for ages, the object of the warmest hope and highest expectation. He is called in Scripture, *The hope, and the consolation of Israel*. His incarnation was the fulfilling of all the prophecies, and of the promises which had from time to time been delivered to their fathers; with respect to which, thousands had lived and died in faith. Of *Abraham*, we are told, that *he saw* the Saviour's day, and *rejoiced* at the sight. And in this respect, Abraham's seed, thro' all the several ages of the Jewish church, were followers of their great father's

* The words of the former are these, "An ancient and constant opinion prevailed thro' the whole East, that the fates had decreed, that from Judea there should come forth those who should govern the world." A tradition which is almost a verbal translation of *Mic. v. 2*. The passage in *Tacitus* is this, "Many had a persuasion that it was contained in the ancient books of the Priests," (most probably meaning the Old Testament prophecies) "that at that very time the East should prevail, and that they should come out of Judea who should govern the world." The last expression is the same with that of *Suetonius*. The former evidently refers to *Zach. vi. 12*. where the Messiah is thus described, *The man whose name is* *נחש*, a word which is rendered in our translation the *Branch*, but also signifies the *East*.

See Abp. Tillotson's Sermons, Vol. V. Sermon 50.

faith.

faith. As the appointed time approached, the desires and hopes of these ancient believers were strengthened. Good old *Simeon* is a remarkable instance, of whom it is said, (Luke ii. 12.) *That he was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel.* Who, when he saw the holy child, Jesus, in a sacred ecstasy, *took him into his arms, and blessed God*; saying, like one who was fully satisfied with life, and had seen all that was worth living for, *Now Lord lettest thou thy servant depart in peace according to thy word*; for, my highest expectations are answered, as *mine eyes have seen thy salvation.* (Luke ii. 28.) This salvation, this promised, this long expected Saviour, was the glory of the second temple. In the very next words the prophet asserts as much; *and I will fill this house with glory, saith the Lord of hosts.* It follows, (ver. 8.) *The silver and the gold is mine, saith the Lord of hosts.* q. d. "The Temple which Solomon built was more richly ornamented with silver and gold than this which you are now raising; but this is not because I have not the same command over the riches of the earth that I formerly had. All the silver and gold in the world is my property, and at my disposal; and I could bring it in whatever quantities I pleased to beautify this structure, and render it superior to the first: but this is not my pleasure: notwithstanding (as it immediately follows) *The glory of this house shall be greater than of the former, saith the Lord of hosts:*" and, as a further explication of this promise, it is said, *in this place I will give PEACE.* By which term is meant either our Lord Jesus Christ himself; or the grand blessing consequent upon his incarnation.—Some understand it of Christ himself; and not without reason, for he is not only called *the Prince*
of

of Peace; and prophesied of as *speaking peace to the nations*, but the term *Peace* is (on this account) applied to him as one of his distinguishing titles. The prophet *Micah*, (ch. v. 5.) says of him, *This man shall be THE PEACE*; and the apostle Paul, *He is our peace*. (Eph. ii. 14.) But it will amount to much the same, if we suppose this clause of the prophecy refers to the great *blessing of peace*; for this, in the noblest and most extensive sense of the word, is the grand fruit of the Redeemer's mission. This was the delightful theme which employed the songs of angels when they attended the incarnate Saviour at his birth: *Glory to God in the highest, on earth peace*. Peace between man and man was one of the mighty blessings of that new empire which he came to establish. But the greatest of all was, Peace with God. Reconciliation and friendship with the offended Majesty of Heaven. The term *peace*, indeed, as it is used both in the Old Testament and in the New, comprehends every kind of happiness; and therefore, *peace be with you*, was a common form of salutation. Accordingly our Lord, when he was about to leave his disciples, addressed them in these words: *Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you*. He adds, *not as the world giveth, give I unto you*: "not as a mere empty compliment, but as the genuine dictate of my heart; and in the most extensive sense of the word, I not only *wish*, as the world does, but actually *give* peace to all my genuine disciples: A peace far superior to that which the world generally means by that common salutation: a peace which the world cannot give if it would, and which no one but myself is able to bestow." It is said of our blessed Redeemer, (in every important sense in which the term can be applied)

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He came and preached peace to them that were afar off, and to them that were nigh. Yea, that he made peace by the blood of his cross.

From this brief view of the Messiah's character, and the great design of his mission, it is easy to discern with what propriety the second temple, which was honoured with his presence, is said to have a glory superior to that of the first. The first indeed had a glory, as Christ was evidently prefigured by the various rites prescribed to those that worshipped in it; particularly by the sacrifices that were there offered, which were typical of him who *in the end of the world* was to *put away sin by the sacrifice of himself*; and the atonement which the high-priest made every year for the sins of the people within the Holy of Holies, which represented the glorious undertaking of Jesus, *the High-priest of our profession, who is passed into the holiest of all with his own blood, and ever appears in the presence of God for us*. We may say of this and that ceremony of Solomon's temple, what the apostle does of the *rock* in the wilderness, that *it was Christ*. But then it was Christ only in type or shadow; whereas it was reserved as the peculiar glory of the *second* temple to receive Christ in *person*. Even that bright appearance over the mercy-seat, which was called *The Glory*, that eminent symbol of the divine presence, which was peculiar to the temple of Solomon, was but an emblem of him, *in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily*; of whom it was prophesied that *he should come into the latter house as his temple*. (*Mal. iii. 2.*) The literal accomplishment of that prophecy is confirmed by various testimonies in the evangelical history; in which we are told, not only that he was brought, as other children were, *to be presented before the Lord*, when good
old

old Simeon so joyfully embraced him as the long-expected Saviour; and that he was found at twelve years of age disputing with the doctors in the temple; but also that he there preached in person the glorious doctrines of his everlasting gospel. We read (*Luke xix. 47.*) that *he taught daily in the temple.* And again. (*chap. xx. 1.*) that *he taught the people in the temple, and preached the gospel, the gospel of peace.* There with his own sacred lips he fulfilled that grand commission, which, in prophetic language, he is represented as thus describing, (*Isa. lxi. 1—3.*) *The Spirit of the Lord God is upon me, because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek, he hath sent me to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound: to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, and the day of vengeance of our God: to comfort all that mourn: to give unto them that mourn in Zion beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.* This was the joyful sound with which the second temple was heard to ring: *bles- sed were that people who heard and knew it.* Glorious personage! heavenly preacher! who delivered such precious soul-reviving doctrine as this! This was he of whom all the prophets spake, and who was greater than they all. How much more glorious did his presence render this latter house, than ever that was which king Solomon built! for *behold a greater than Solomon was here.* This was the *Prince of the kings of the earth!* yea, *this was God manifest in the flesh!*

Who would not have been a worshipper in that house, when Jesus graced it with his presence, rather than when in *its first glory*; there to have *be- held the glory of this only begotten of the Father,*
 who

who appeared so full of grace and truth? How gladly should we have thrown wide open our temple doors to have received this heavenly visitant! — But if we, my friends, are Christians indeed, we have no cause to regret the want of his glorious presence in our assemblies. We enjoy it now. There is a sense in which he honours his church as his temple with his presence still. He promised he would do so, when he was upon earth, yea that he would *be with it always even unto the end of the world*. He moreover condescended to declare, that *wheresoever two or three should meet together in his name, he would be there in the midst of them*. In whatever place the disciples of Jesus assemble as believers in him, out of regard to his authority, and with a view to his honour; to worship their common Father through him as the only Mediator; to hear Christ preached, and his doctrine of peace proclaimed; or to commemorate his dying love in the ordinance of his supper; there we may conceive of him as being present still; nor will any outward circumstance in the place or people exclude him. If it be our happiness thus to meet in the name of Jesus *here*, we are warranted to say, *The Lord is with us of a truth, and this is none other than the house of God*. On this consideration the meanest of our churches may be affirmed to have a glory greater than the temple which Solomon built, for a greater than Solomon is *here* also.

Let us adore his greatness, and at the same time admire his condescending grace, saying with that wise king of Israel at the dedication of the temple, *Will God in very deed dwell with men upon earth? The heaven, even the heaven of heavens, cannot contain thee, how much less this house which I have built!* — At the same time that we shew a due

solicitude to maintain a proper decency in every thing that relates to God's worship, let us guard against whatever looks like a vain complacency in any thing external, and especially against all affectation of pomp and shew; remembering how unsuitable this is to that spiritual dispensation under which we have the happiness to live. Sensible how much superior a glory the presence of Christ gives to our churches, than all the *silver and gold* in the universe could give, let us be desirous that this house may be filled with this *excellent glory*: that Jesus, the *desire of all nations*, may take up his lasting abode here, so that we may *behold the beauty of the Lord when we enquire in his temple*, and experience the blessed effects of his spiritual presence, in the success of those gospel ordinances which are administered here in his name. *In this place may the Lord of hosts give peace.* Here may the blessed *gospel of peace* long be preached in its purity. Here may many sinners be brought to accept the terms of reconciliation which it proposes. Here may we for years to come meet together in peace and love, as the loyal subjects of the Prince of Peace; and experience, in its fullest extent, that peace, that real permanent felicity, which he has promised to all such! — To conclude; let us all be concerned to maintain such a temper and deportment in the whole of life as shall best correspond with our peculiar advantages under that new dispensation, which derives its distinguishing glory from the presence, mediation and grace of the Son of God; and, as a society, to make such evident improvements in every part of a Christian character, and our manner of attending divine institutions, in particular, as will reflect the greatest honour upon our name and profession



DISCOURSE II.

THE hint which closed the former discourse shall be pursued in this; in which I intended, in the

THIRD PLACE, to mention some things relating to the character of Christian worshippers, which constitute the glory of our churches, and the most important difference between one and another.

It is unnecessary to prove that they cannot derive any real excellence from any thing magnificent and pompous in regard to externals. This is so far from being the case, that where the greatest outward splendor has appeared, the real internal glory has sometimes departed. This occasioned *Augustin* to say, "When the church had wooden chalices she had golden priests, but when she came to have golden chalices, she had wooden priests." The corruption of pure Christianity, and the want of vital religion in the professors of it, took place when emperors, becoming Christian, attempted to unite religion to the state, and to put the kingdom of Christ upon a footing with the kingdoms of this world; dignifying the ministers of it with riches and power, and erecting magnificent temples for them to officiate in. A church is not composed of inanimate materials, into whatever form they are cast, (as the common use of the word absurdly supposes) but of a number of the faithful united for

worshipping God. Accordingly the apostle says to believers, *Ye are God's building*; and elsewhere styles them *the temples of the Holy Ghost*. So that the increasing glory of a church consists not in the improving elegance and splendor of the building in which it meets, but in the moral excellence and beauty of the members of it. To this effect Jehovah himself speaks to the Jews, when they had finished their temple: *The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool. Where is the house that ye build unto me, and where is the place of my rest? For all these things hath mine hand made, and all those things have been, (or, as the LXX. read it, all those things are mine) saith the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor, and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word.* Isa. lxvi. 1, 2.

A Christian temple may be said to increase in glory, when the following circumstances are observable in it.

1. When the number of worshippers is increased. It is a pleasure to see a full assembly there, or a gradually increasing one. It gives spirit to the audience as well as the preacher, and affords an encouraging prospect of good being done; particularly when the increase is not owing to a vain curiosity excited by the oratorical talents of the speaker, or any thing new and uncommon in his doctrine or manner of delivering it; where one interest is not raised at the expence of another, as is often the case when the preacher's popularity only is at bottom; but when numbers of those are brought constantly to attend divine worship, who had been used entirely, or for the most part, to neglect it; more especially if they behave with decency, and discover the marks of attention and seriousness. In such circumstances,

a numerous and growing assembly is a pleasing sight.—But it is yet more earnestly to be wished,

2dly, That the gospel ministry may be more successful in bringing real converts to Christ, and making men *wise to salvation*. This is the grand design of preaching the gospel, and if it be not answered, it matters not that our houses are filled with hearers, or that they are brought to attend to and admire what they hear, or even to entertain the most just apprehensions of divine truths, and give them the warmest reception. While men remain strangers to Christ, being *dead in trespasses and sins*, we labour in vain and spend our strength for nought. But when a divine energy so attends the faithful preaching of the gospel, as to promote in the minds of many, a serious concern about their everlasting interests; when many are *pricked at the heart*, and brought to cry out, *What must I do to be saved?* when convictions appear to be genuine by their being permanent, and end in a thorough conversion of the soul from sin to holiness; then Christian ministers and people have solid reason to rejoice; particularly when those converts are disposed to join themselves as visible members of the church of Christ. Nothing can delight the hearts of faithful ministers more than to hear many, and more especially many young persons, awakened by their means, *asking the way to Zion with their faces thitherwards*. Nothing can more rejoice the hearts of all real Christians than this, nor can any thing add greater beauty to the churches of our Redeemer. *Glorious things* were indeed *spoken of Zion*, when it was said (*Pf. lxxxvii. 4.*) *This and that man was born in her*; and glorious will this house be, if *the Lord shall count when he writeth up the people*, with respect to many a soul, *this man*

was born here. Here this and the other man and woman began their lives anew; were born into the world of grace, and became alive to God; began to live that holy and divine life which shall never be extinct, but be crowned with immortality. To have but one soul thus born here, would be a greater glory to this place, and your minister would think himself more honoured in being instrumental to it, than if he should be the means of bringing hundreds of the wisest and wealthiest of mankind to become his zealous admirers and followers, but yet die in their sins. —I add

3dly; It contributes much to the increasing glory of a christian society when the members of it visibly improve in what is truly amiable and excellent. And here, so many particulars offer themselves, as deserving attention on this occasion, that I shall consider the principal of them apart under so many distinct heads of advice to those professing godliness amongst us.

(1.) Give me leave to recommend a growing care to understand the principles of religion, and to attain a solid and rational evidence of those truths which you have imbibed. It is much to the dishonour of christian professors, and of great disservice to their religion, that so few of them are able to *give a judicious answer to any one that enquires a reason of the hope that is in them.* It is of great importance not only to the credit of the gospel in the world, but to the usefulness, the comfort, and even the holiness of christians, that their judgments be well informed concerning the evidence of christianity in general, and the particular doctrines of it. For want of which many are *blowed about with every wind of doctrine*, and become a ready prey to those that *lie in wait to deceive.* Be

diligent therefore, christians, in reading your Bible, and in using every proper method to understand it; and pray that the good *Spirit* of God may lead you into all truth, and build you up in your most holy faith. — And permit me, on this occasion, to recommend the study of your principles as *Protestant Dissenters* from the church of England. The want of this, is the source of great bigotry in some, and great indifference in others. By either of these our cause may be injured: by both it is greatly injured in the present age. And is it any wonder that it should, when those who profess to be its warmest friends know not why they are so? Or when those who have been educated amongst us, discern so little difference between our mode of worship and that by law established, as to *halt between* two opinions, and be zealously attached to neither. If you know not why you are Dissenters, enquire. If upon enquiry you see not sufficient reason to remain such, conform. If the enquiry should confirm you in the grounds of your dissent, be steadfast in it. Be candid towards those that differ (as indeed a calm enquiry will make you) but never be ashamed of your principles. Let others know what they are, when proper occasion offers, and take every prudent method to defend and propagate them. Be tenacious of *that liberty wherewith Christ has made us free*, and for which our fore-fathers so nobly contended, even unto blood. But *use not your liberty as a cloak of maliciousness*. Be thankful for a government under which you enjoy so many privileges, and be peaceable and dutiful subjects under it, as one means to have them preserved. Remember that apostolic precept, *honour the king*; the connection of which is remarkable

remarkable, as it immediately follows an exhortation to *fear God*.

(2.) Let me recommend a growing love to divine institutions, and an increasing diligence in attending upon them. The public ordinances of God's house are the grand means of preserving alive a sense of religion in the world, and of promoting the improvement of those who have felt the power of it. It is therefore much to the disgrace of its professors, either totally to turn their backs upon them, or to suffer any little inconvenience, arising from the distance of the place, or the weather, or any trifling indisposition, or any circumstance relating to food or dress, frequently to detain them, or any part of their families, at home, on either part of the Lord's day. In this respect the Dissenters have sadly fallen off from the pious zeal of their ancestors, whose fame is still in the churches for their strict observation of the Sabbath, and their diligent attendance on the public worship of it. This was a circumstance which contributed much to the glory of their churches, and it would greatly tend to recover and increase that of ours. Let us do our part towards so desirable an end. The liberty which we enjoy for erecting houses of worship where-ever we will, and assembling in them whenever we please, to serve God according to the dictates of our own consciences, is so invaluable a privilege, so much superior to what many of our ancestors enjoyed, that to be remiss in the improvement of it, will discover great insensibility and shameful ingratitude. The ordinances of religion are so important, our opportunity for enjoying them so precarious, and the account we are all soon to give of the manner in which we have improved them so solemn, that those who are indifferent in attending
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upon them, in proportion as they are so, sin against God, injure their characters, and wrong their own souls; as well as grieve the hearts of their ministers and other christian friends, and give plain proof that they have felt but little of the power of godliness. May I not add? such persons contribute greatly to bring public worship into discredit, and to promote infidelity and atheism in the world, especially among the rising generation, who are of themselves prone enough (without the help of such examples) to be *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God*. Suffer, then, the word of exhortation, and *forsake not the assembling of yourselves together, as the manner of some* (yea of many in the present day) *is*. Whatever others do, let it be your resolution *that you and yours will serve the Lord*. Command your children and your whole household after you, *that they may keep his ways*: Let none of them ever spend a Sabbath at home without some sufficient cause. If but half that contrivance were exercised for the honour of divine worship, and the interest of religion in the soul, which the generality of us discover about our outward ease and convenience, our bodily health, and our worldly advantage, there are but few of our houses (excepting where there is the care of infants and the sick) that would require the attendance even of servants at home on either part, much less both parts, of the Lord's day. And how glorious the sight, to behold whole families *going to the house of God in company*, and decently presenting themselves before the Lord, *of whom the whole family in heaven and on earth is named*!

It is further to be wished, that professors of religion would more readily embrace such opportunities as offer, for the social worship of God on the

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the *week-day*. How much more in character is it for christians, when necessary business does not confine them at home, to unite together as brethren in the exercises of devotion, than to spend their time in complimentary, or even friendly visits, how ever commendable at other seasons; and especially in mixed assemblies of the gay and irreligious part of mankind. Surely those who *love* as they ought *the habitation of God's house*, will be glad, whenever providence calls upon them to go up to worship there. — I must add here, that it would contribute much to the honour of our societies and of religion too, if those who call themselves christians were more generally to attend that institution which is designed as the peculiar badge of a christian profession, the supper of the Lord; which is also an eminent means of confirming and improving the soul in the ways of God and religion. To see the house of God filled, but his table almost deserted; to have the majority of a congregation withdraw when the ordinary service is over, and scarcely a fourth part stay to shew forth the Lord's death as he has commanded all his disciples to do, is certainly a great reproach upon our societies, and looks like a shameful disrespect to the Saviour's name.

I cannot dismiss this head, without taking notice of one circumstance by which our regard to public ordinances may be expressed; and that is being *early* in our attendance upon them. It is not merely an impropriety, it is a shameful evil, that so few persons make a point of being present when public worship begins; and that it is the common practice of so many to come in when almost one half of it is over. Not to insist upon the indecency of such a conduct in respect to those who lead the public devotions, and the disturbance

turbance which it occasions them and others when engaged in addressing their Maker; let me ask, has it not the appearance of great irreverence and lukewarmness to begin the solemn worship of the Almighty in so abrupt a manner, or to be absent from any part of it? Surely a due respect to the Majesty of heaven, and a warm delight in his service, would dispose persons to secure a few moments in his house, to recollect themselves and compose their minds, before they address his awful throne, that they may not be chargeable with *rushing into his presence as the horse rusheth into the battle, nor offer the sacrifice of fools.* The prayer with which our worship generally begins, in which we implore the divine assistance and blessing, and the reading of the holy scriptures, which follows it, have an happy tendency to prepare the heart for the other services of God's house; and those who wilfully and frequently absent themselves from either, have reason to fear lest God should be so offended with their irreverence and indevotion as to leave them to themselves, and refuse to accept their broken offerings. Besides, it is so lovely a sight, to behold an whole assembly regularly seated before divine service is begun, and all with one consent rise up to address their common parent, that I am persuaded if the neglect of it were not so common it would not be endured. And those who have habituated themselves to an early attendance, have experienced the pleasure and benefit of it to be such, as to be under no temptation to remissness. Such persons not only feel an inward uneasiness, but discover the marks of shame and confusion if at any time they are undesignedly too late. And give me leave to say, few people need be often too late, unless they design to be so. Where the time for beginning is
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fixed and exactly observed, and where the service is so short, as it now usually is, none can have in ordinary, the least shadow of an excuse. The conduct of those who frequent places of public diversion, who often wait an hour or two before the entertainment (of three or four hours) begins, is a severe reproof upon many of God's worshippers in the present day. Let us of this assembly do what we can to wipe off the reproach. — Another head of advice which I beg leave to recommend with the same view is,

(4.) Be more careful with respect to the *manner* in which the several parts of public service are performed.

To begin with the hearing of the word preached. Remember our Lord's exhortation, *Take heed how ye hear*. That you may most effectually comply with it, let me intreat your serious and candid attention to the following brief hints of advice. Hear the word with minds duly prepared, like *good ground*, to receive the *good seed*; with hearts open to conviction, truly desirous to know the truth, and to obey it. — Hear with a serious reverent attention, remembering the greatness of that Being, who is to be considered as speaking whensoever his truths are preached, and the interest you have in them, *for they are your life*. — Hear with candour, meekness and humility, as well as with caution. This well becomes those who attend the ministry of fallible men, and who also know *themselves* to be such. *Let every man be swift to hear; slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God*. — Attend more to the things that are delivered than to the persons that deliver them. Let not one say, *I am of Paul*, or another *I am*
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of *Apollos*, as if *Christ* were divided. Lay aside all undue prejudice either against or in favour of the ministers you hear. *Let every man so account of us as the servants*, and only servants of *Jesus Christ*. — Guard against a vain curiosity, which might lead you to seek something *new* rather than something useful, and thus to resemble the *Athenians*, of whom it is said, that they *spent their time in hearing or telling some new thing*. The more effectually to prevent the evil consequences of this pernicious disposition, be constant in attending those ministers whom you can the most conveniently hear, and whose preaching has been the means of doing you the greatest good. There are many hearers in the present day, of the same stamp with those whom the apostle describes as *heaping up to themselves teachers, having itching ears*. If you would be *stedfast in the faith*, and become judicious, useful Christians, suffer not yourselves to be of this number, to rove from place to place, nor to be led away from your own pastors by those who cry up this and the other person as an extraordinary preacher. To scatter *Christ's flock* is one of *Satan's devices* to destroy the sheep. To hear divine truths in their *connexion* (which roving hearers cannot do) is of great moment in order to the right understanding and the proper improvement of them. — Further; hear principally with a view to your real and eternal advantage, and let every thing else be subservient to that end. Be not so much concerned to be pleased as to be improved; to have the imagination delighted, or the passions raised, as to have the judgment informed, and the heart and life made better. To this end, readily submit to correction and reproof. Be willing to be freely dealt

dealt with; and love faithfulness in your ministers more than flattery. — Be ready to hear all the several subjects of preaching discoursed upon in their turn. Expect and desire to hear your duty as well as your privilege, and prefer what has an immediate relation to practice, to matters of *doubtful disputation*, which *engender strife*. Do not expect that your ministers should always express just your own views of some controverted matters, nor be offended if they do not; but allow them the same liberty of thinking for themselves which you claim and exercise. — Consent that the cases and characters of other hearers should be attended to as well as your own, and be willing that others should sometimes be pleased as well as yourselves. To conclude this head; always hear the word with a due dependance upon, and earnest supplications for, that grace which is able to command success, and without which *Paul may plant, and Apollos water in vain*.

But do not conceive of the hearing of the word as the only, or the most important part of divine worship. Properly speaking, it is not worship at all. Permit me to recommend an increasing attention to what is so: viz. Praying to and praising God; and the rather, as there is scarcely any thing more culpable in Dissenters, or that is made use of more to their disadvantage, than their neglect here. There are few persons, especially strangers, but must have observed in our places of worship, that when the minister has been addressing God in the name, and as the mouth of the people, great part of them discover not the smallest sign that they are joining in the solemn service; but by their vacant countenances and trifling postures, seem as if they had no interest in what is doing.

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And among those who appear to be attentive; many seem rather to be hearing the minister pray than praying themselves. This is a dreadful evil, and such as every friend to religion and the dissenting interest would wish to cure. Perhaps it might be of service in this view, if the posture of *kneeling* (which most of us use in our family worship) were to be more common in public prayer. It would certainly have a more decent appearance, and would so far tend to promote devotion, as it would prevent the influence of external objects on the senses, which cause the thoughts to wander; and would afford such a relief to the body as the length of our prayers often requires. But perhaps, the very *mode* of prayer which we adopt, (how much soever extemporary prayer may have the advantage of a liturgy *upon the whole*) requires greater care to guard the senses, to keep the thoughts fixed, and to offer up the public petitions to God as our own, than a stated form does, in which the people are required to bear a vocal part. It behoves us, my brethren, to take great care that our *good be not evil spoken of*, and that a method of devotion which, on the whole, we judge the most scriptural and edifying, be not brought into disrepute by our abuse of it, nor made an hindrance instead of an help to devotion. As we who lead your devotions ought, for this reason, to take all possible care of the prayers we utter, you are obliged to take equal care in joining with us. Remember that in prayer, your business is not to hear but to pray. Attend then, with the utmost seriousness, to every petition, thanksgiving, &c. that is uttered, and be not satisfied with merely understanding or approving them, but make them your own, and address them to
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the throne of grace as the language of your own hearts. Unless you do this, you are chargeable with a solemn mockery of God. And while those prayers of other persons, which you may be ready to despise because repeated from a form, (if presented with the true spirit of prayer) will rise as sweet incense to heaven, yours will be the prayers of the hypocrite which the Lord abhors. God's house is called *an house of prayer*. If when we are assembled in it, we do not pray; whether we content ourselves with reading forms of prayer, or sink into formality without them, he will not own it as his house, nor us as his people. Let us then, take heed that we cultivate more of the spirit and grace of prayer; and seek in a greater degree that *spirit of grace and supplication* which is promised as one of the peculiar blessings of the new covenant.

There is another part of public service which is too important to be wholly omitted here, and that is, Singing the divine praises. The devotional part of this service does indeed demand our principal regard; and this, let it be remembered, stands on the same footing with that of prayer, being a solemn address to the divine Majesty, with whom the least appearance of trifling is dreadful presumption. We ought always to *sing* as well as *pray with the understanding and with the spirit* of devotion; *with grace in our hearts to the Lord*. But the external part of this branch of worship is by no means unworthy a Christian's notice, but on the contrary is of great importance, on account of its influence on the devotion of a society, which cannot be very steady and intense, when the generality of worshippers have so little acquaintance with the art of psalmody as to be

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perpetually offending the ear with the most discordant sounds, and seem scarcely able to carry on the tune. Whereas singing of psalms, when performed in a graceful melodious manner, adds a beauty to the worship of the sanctuary, and is capable of an happy effect upon those affections which God has wisely implanted in our natures, and thus of assisting and improving our devotion. The neglect of this art in a part of the world where almost every *other* is thought essential to a good education, is a great reflection upon our taste as well as our piety; and it would tend to retrieve the honour of our societies in both these views to bring about a speedy reformation. I submit it to the leading members of this church, whether some expedient might not be found, and ought not to be used, in order thus to advance the honour, the pleasure and benefit of God's worship in this place. — Another thing which will contribute to your increasing glory is,

(4.) A constant increase in christian benevolence and love. Brotherly love is a grace in itself so amiable, and productive of such blessed effects, that a greater stress is laid upon this in the writings of the New Testament than almost any other; and this is peculiarly recommended by the example and the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is this that most of all transforms the soul into a divine likeness. *God is love, and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.* This our Saviour represents as his *new commandment*. This he makes a discriminating character of his true disciples. Let us shew to *all men that we are his disciples by our love one to another. Let us love not in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.* As members of the same christian society;
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let us be kindly affectioned one towards another, in honour preferring one another, and doing all in our power to serve each other's interest.—Let us be more zealous in promoting our common cause and the interest of Christ amongst us; employing our counsel, our authority, our prayers, our example, and our substance also, to advance the cause of our dear Redeemer, and the flourishing estate of this his church; nor think any labour or any expence, of which we are capable, too great to subserve so glorious an end. Let us particularly study the things that make for peace, as those by which, more especially, one may edify another.—But let us not confine our regards to ourselves, or our own party: let our benevolence extend itself not only to all the denominations of Protestant Dissenters, and whatever concerns their common interest, but also to our brethren of the church of England, and whatever respects the interest of religion at large. Let us love all them who love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity, of whatever name, knowing that we are all one in him. Let all bigotry and uncharitableness cease from amongst us. Let us learn to put the same candid construction on the sentiments and practices of those that differ from us, which we would wish them to put on ours. Let us shew to our enemies that we are willing to live peaceably with all men; that we seek not our own things, but the things which are Jesus Christ's.—Once more,

(5.) As ever we wish to increase the glory of our churches, let us see to it that we be not conformed to the world, in the vain and sinful customs of it, but labour after greater degrees of simplicity, spirituality and heavenly-mindedness. It is much to be lamented, that in this respect

the Dissenters have so sadly degenerated from what they were in the last age. An uninterrupted series of liberty and prosperity has had a far worse effect upon them than the severest persecutions ever had. Time was, when professing Christians among us might generally be distinguished from their neighbours by a sacred indifference to the riches, the honours, and the pleasures of the present life. But alas! is there not reason now to ask, *What do ye more than others?* Do we not seem as eager after the world as other men? as strongly attached to the profits and honours of it, and as fully bent upon its pleasures? Places of public diversion (into which our ancestors would have been shocked at the thought of entering) too commonly engage large portions of that wealth, and (what is far more valuable) that *time*, which ought to be employed about things of public utility, if not devoted to the interest of our families. And often I fear the vain unseasonable amusements of the age, private as well as public, rob God of his due, by breaking in upon the devotions of the family and the closet, if not of the church. How much soever we may have ingratiated ourselves with the men of the world by this our great complaisance, and improved their opinion of us, it is really to our reproach. Let us, my friends, lament it, if in any instances we have caught the deadly infection, and let us do our utmost to stop the growing evil, and recover the honour we have forfeited. Let us never be ashamed to distinguish ourselves in the cause of God and religion. In such a cause it is noble to be singular, and they are cowards that dare not be so. Let us remember the obligations we are under as the disciples of Christ, and as dissenters from
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from a national church, *to come out from among the carnal part of mankind, and be separate*, and to keep ourselves *unspotted from the world*; to behave as *strangers and pilgrims* here on earth, who profess to be seeking another and *better country, even an heavenly*. Let us not be sour or morose; let us not affect singularity in matters of indifference; but let our temper be chearful, and our conversation easy. Let us ever be ready to oblige where we can with a good conscience; and where we cannot, let us take care not to offend. Let us always shew, that when we differ from the world, it is not from caprice, but principle, and do our part that the difference may be lessened, by bringing the world nearer to us. In a word, let our general language, disposition and behaviour be so irreproachable, amiable and engaging, and the whole of it discover so much of the *wisdom of the serpent*, and the *innocence of the dove*, that it may stop the mouth of slander, and make our enemies at peace with us. *Let our lights so shine before men, that they beholding our good works may glorify our Father who is in heaven.* These fruits of the Spirit appearing in our lives, will add the greatest lustre to our characters, and will be assuredly *found to our praise, and honour, and glory now, as well as at the appearing of Jesus Christ.*

To close the whole; Let us lament the sad declensions visible in our churches, and mourn to think that with regard to the preceding particulars, our temple is so much inferior to what it once was; that *the glory* has in so great a measure *departed*. Let us be thankful that it is not quite withdrawn. And let it be our frequent, fervent prayer, and at the same time the object
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of our most diligent endeavours, in the use of all proper means, and in an humble dependance on the grace of God's Spirit, that the glory which is lost may be restored. That God may yet revive the cause of primitive Christianity among his British churches. *Let thy work, O Lord, appear unto thy servants, and thy glory unto their children!*

Particularly, let us use our endeavours and our prayers, that in the several respects now mentioned, the *glory of this house* may be increased; so that, tho' it is scarcely to be expected it should ever equal, much less exceed, what it once was, when those *burning and shining lights* * were fixed in it which have long been extinguished, and whose *works still praise them*; yet that (to allude to *Exra iii. 12.*) those few *ancient men that are left among us, who saw it in its first glory*, may not be constrained to weep on the remembrance of it.

And let us contemplate with pleasure that delightful prospect which the promises of God open to our view, and pray, as well as hope, for the accomplishment of them, respecting the latter glory of our Redeemer's kingdom on earth, when Jews and Gentiles shall flock in unto it; with respect to which future period, those words (*Isa. lx. 1.*) may be applied to the church with greater propriety than they ever could in any former one, *Arise, shine, for thy light is come, and the glory of the Lord is risen upon thee.* In the hope of that event, let us adopt the words of the same prophet in our prayers, and say, *For Zion's sake I will not hold my peace, until the righteousness thereof go forth*

* Particularly Dr. Bates and Mr. Matthew Henry, in whose time the division in the congregation of Dissenters at Hackney had not taken place.

as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth; and till the Gentiles shall see thy righteousness, and all kings thy glory.

Finally, let us think with joy of that temple above which God has prepared for all his humble worshippers here, where every thing that contributes to their honour and felicity now, shall be enjoyed in its utmost perfection. God grant, that having dwelt all our days in his house below, we may all at last have a place in that *house not made with hands eternal in the heavens*, in which God eminently dwells with men; and with respect to which those words may be applied to every real Christian, *The Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light*, and thy GOD THY GLORY. Amen!

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